



June 2, 2011

The Honourable Leona Aglukkaq
Minister of Health
Health Canada
Brooke Claxton Building, Tunney's Pasture
Postal Locator: 0906C
Ottawa, Ontario K1A 0K9

Dear Minister Aglukkaq:

Warm greetings! On behalf of the members of Pacific Hepatitis C Network (PHCN) and the Pacific AIDS Network (PAN), we wish to convey our congratulations to you on your re-appointment as the Minister of Health. We wish you and your colleagues every success in the coming years in addressing the challenges and opportunities that presently exist within Canada's cherished health care system.

The PHCN and PAN are two provincial networks in BC that work in the area of Hepatitis C (HCV) and HIV/HCV co-infection. Our two networks and the member organizations of our respective networks are very committed to addressing the HCV epidemic in this province. BC's HCV infection rate is 54.9/100,000 - considerably above the national rate of 36.1/100,000, with the province ranking #3 of all Canadian provinces and territories for both incidence and prevalence of HCV. And as no doubt you are also aware, between 2004 and 2008, reported rates of acute HCV were 5.5 times as high in Aboriginal persons in Canada as in non-Aboriginal persons.

Given the realities of hepatitis C as a significant and ongoing public health threat in BC, and in Canada, it is with respect and a certain element of urgency that we write seeking a timely response from your office with regards to expected timelines for final signature on the Public Health Agency of Canada's Hepatitis C Prevention, Support and Research Program for community-based project funding. By way of background, in July of 2010, PHAC announced an Invitation to Submit an Application (ISA) for potential funding for HCV-specific projects. The deadline for applications here in the BC Region was mid-September. The PHAC BC Regional office made determinations as to which projects to recommend for funding in October 2010.

After the writ was dropped, four of the recommended groups here in BC with pre-existing HCV contracts/projects were invited to apply for a contract extension - which were ultimately granted by

PHAC to June 17th. While we are grateful that arrangements were made to ensure funding for some of the recommended (previously existing) projects up to June 17th, the future beyond that is very unclear. And of course, the new projects that were successful in the competition for funding have not been able to begin at all.

These community-based projects are vital to promoting the health and well-being of people living with hepatitis C throughout BC. In some instances the projects are designed to build the capacity of the community-based response to be more effective in addressing the HCV epidemic. In other instances, the projects are ones that are dedicated to the delivery of prevention / education programs designed to prevent new infections – a highly cost-effective approach when one considers the cost of end stage liver disease alone to range from \$500,000 - \$1 million per patient in British Columbia.

We are writing on behalf of our own organizations and each of the five other community-based organizations in BC, all of whom were recommended for funding but have yet the privilege and opportunity of a signed contribution agreement with PHAC. We look forward to the Minister's written response to this letter and to beginning the important and exciting work encapsulated within each contribution agreement.

Thank you very much for your time with and kind attention to our letter and request.

Sincerely,

Deb Schmitz
Executive Director
Pacific Hepatitis C Network

Jennifer Evin Jones
Executive Director
Pacific AIDS Network

cc. Vanessa West, Executive Director, Positive Living North No Kheyoh t'sih'en t'sehena Society
Cheryl Dowden, Executive Director, ANKORS
Bridget Findlay, Chair of the Board, Positive Living Fraser Valley
Kelly L'Hirondelle, Executive Director, YouthCO AIDS Society
Katrina Jensen, Executive Director, AIDS Vancouver Island
Keith McDonald, Chair of the Board, Pacific Hepatitis C Network
Marcie Summers, Chair of the Board, Pacific AIDS Network Society